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# Seeking Asylum Adolescents Explore the Crossroads of Human Rights Education and Cosmopolitan Critical Literacy

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# Seeking Asylum

## ADOLESCENTS EXPLORE THE CROSSROADS OF HUMAN RIGHTS EDUCATION AND COSMOPOLITAN CRITICAL LITERACY

*Judith Dunkerly-Bean, Thomas Bean, & Khaled Alnajjar*

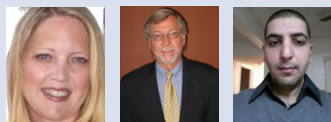
Urban middle school students utilize human rights education and cosmopolitan critical literacy to explore local and global issues around immigrants and refugees through the production of a BYOT short film.

The purpose of this study was to explore middle school (grade 6–8) students’ understanding and interpretations of local and global human rights issues as they created a film after reading multimedia texts and engaging in human rights/citizenship education activities. This research, situated in an urban international school, explores a revisited notion of critical literacy from a cosmopolitan perspective. In revisiting critical literacy, we consider Allan Luke’s (2003) call for “talking about literacy as a means of building cosmopolitan world views and identities” (p. 21). This perspective differs

from previous iterations of critical literacy that reflect regional cultural and policy contexts and Freirean binaries of oppressor/oppressed (Luke, 2012) and instead facilitate what Luke argues is a need for:

A critical approach to literacy that is about engaging with texts and discourses as a means of bridging space and time, critically understanding and altering the connections between the local and the global, moving between cultures and communities, and developing transnational understandings and collaborations. (Luke, 2003, p. 22)

In situating critical literacy within a framework of human rights/citizenship education (HRE/CE), there is a need to explore a perspective of critical literacy that encompasses the global. This is consistent with the notion that critical literacy is “a political project” that those working within it must “reimagine critical literacy in light of contemporary developments related to embodiment and spatiality, digital technology, and globalization” (Lewis, 2014, p. 187). The lives of youth and their literacies are and will be lived out at the intersection of the local and global (Jimenez, Smith, & Teague, 2009) and as Luke (2014) states,



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“critical literacy entails a process of naming and re-naming the world, seeing its patterns, designs and complexities and developing the capacity to redesign and reshape it” (p. 29). For the students in this study, personal and local issues related to immigration placed them directly in that crossroad. We explore ways in which cosmopolitan critical literacy, human rights/citizenship education, and the global issues directly impacting student lives led to the creation of a short film and beginning steps toward advocacy.

## Theoretical Framework

Drawing from Freirean notions of praxis, we situated this study within two complementary frameworks that also hold notions of transformation. The first, cosmopolitan critical literacy, looks to the effects, challenges, and possibilities of a globalized world. The second, human rights and citizenship education, calls on everyone to engage in advocacy for the innate rights of all.

### Cosmopolitan Critical Literacy (CCL) and Globalization

The cosmopolitan critical literacy (CCL) perspective speaks to the possibilities of living and learning at the intersection of the local and the global. Empirical research is documenting students’ literate lives. It reveals how a world youth culture is developing, how global migration is impacting economic and vocational futures, and how the literacy needs and identities of local/global 21st century students are changing due in part to increased digital technology (Baldon & Damico, 2011; Dunkerly-Bean & Bean, 2014; Harper, Bean, & Dunkerly, 2010; Hull et al., 2010; Jimenez, Smith, & Teague, 2009). Within the context of education, the philosophy of cosmopolitanism has been used to address the effects of globalization on formal education (Hull et al., 2010), and raises questions about the utility of literacies and identities bound to a particular nation-state.

Commonly understood notions of critical literacy are somewhat bound to the nation-state and the particularities of dominance, power, and access in an institution, society, or culture (Friere & Macedo, 1987). To be critically literate means being able to not only read and write, but also to assess texts in order to determine who benefits and how one is positioned in order to speak against oppression within the dominant power structure (Comber & Simpson, 2001; Morrell, 2008). When Paulo Freire called on educators to

teach students how to critically read both the word and the world (Freire, 1970), it was a world largely defined by national borders. However, with the influence of globalization on local issues of power, access, and justice, which in turn redefine and transform “borders,” critical literacy seems to be moving toward a transformation as well. In looking to the future of critical literacy, scholars such as Hilary Janks (2010) call for “critical literacy to be nimble enough to change as the situation changes” and to “address both local and global issues” (p. 203). Current critical literacy questions that address silences and positioning (Stevens & Bean, 2007) may be utilized in conjunction with human rights education in order to “offer a framework for national and international solidarity that recognizes but transcends more local identities in a way that is respectful of community allegiances and of overlapping and multiple identifications” (Waldron & Ruane, 2010, pp. 215–216). While critical literacy addresses issues of local social inequality/injustice and their consequences, a cosmopolitan perspective on critical literacy focuses on global human rights and the ramifications of actions in one part of the world resonating throughout the globe.

In short, we are asked to consider our responsibilities as global and local citizens to others and how our literac(ies) might contribute to those efforts. Indeed, as Hull and Stornaiuolo (2010) argue, the play of self, other, and the world is an important part of “developing an ethical stance in the world—without the reflective, reflexive, and critical work on oneself, it seems quite impossible to understand one’s obligations toward others and to develop a just and moral responsiveness toward them” (p. 89).

### Human Rights and Citizenship Education

The notion of human rights recognized today was established with the United Nation’s *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (UDHR) in 1948 written in the aftermath of the Second World War. Although the primary intent of the document was to prevent a recurrence of the human rights travesties that occurred during WWII, the UDHR also provided for education as a human right in Article 26. Given the centrality of education to the realization of universal human rights, it is a focus in a wide range of international conventions including the Convention on the Rights of the Child. As Fionnuala Waldron (2010) elaborates, these documents provide a global framework for providing education for all, and just as importantly, education about and for human rights

for the purpose of creating and protecting a more just global citizenry.

Moreover, it is not enough to share facts about human rights. Rather, human rights education “extends beyond knowledge to include dispositions, attitudes and skills, and is action-oriented” (Waldron, 2010, p. 2). In this way, HRE draws from Freirean notions of praxis. Yet, human rights and citizenship education also bears cosmopolitan nuances as well. Hugh Starkey (2010) speaks to this facet of HRE:

A cosmopolitan perspective includes a global vision that transcends borders. It does not necessarily ignore more local belongings including the national dimension. It rather enables the possibility of choosing an alternative perspective to that which privileges national solidarity over all others. (p. 32)

Starkey explains the interrelatedness of human rights/citizenship education to the cosmopolitan perspective, “when citizenship education is re-conceptualized into a cosmopolitan framework, it starts to take on the transformative potential that has often been advocated but seldom yet realized” (pp. 39–40). Thus, it is at the crossroads of human rights/citizenship education and Freirean notions of critical literacy that we see the greatest potential for a cosmopolitan perspective on both to illuminate the transformative powers of each.

## Methodology

### Research Question

Drawing from these theories, this study sought to answer the following question:

How does cosmopolitan critical literacy, digital media, and human rights/citizenship education materials (HRE/CE) contribute to middle school (grade 6–8) students’ understanding of global issues through the production of a multimodal project?

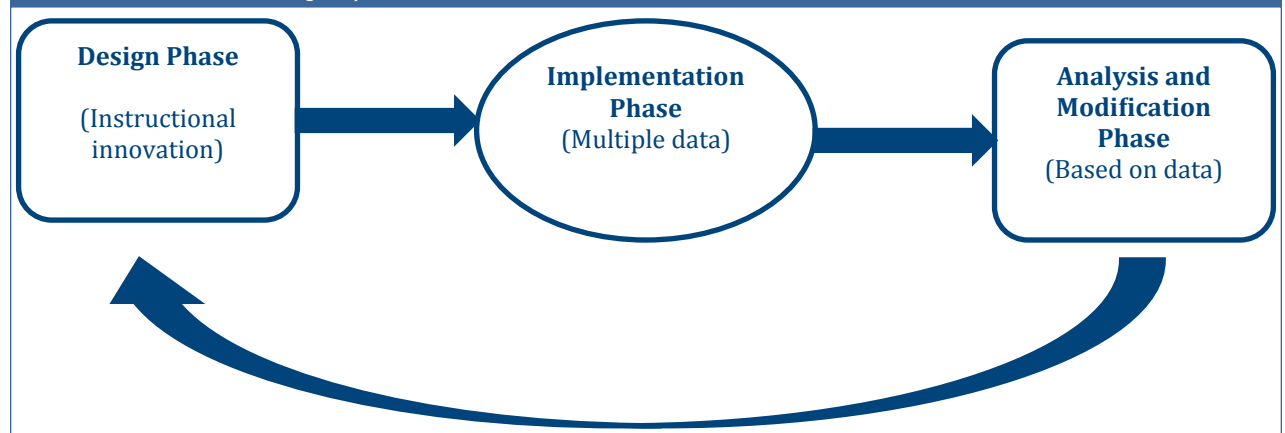
### Formative Design

Formative design is centered on informing classroom literacy practices through the study of an instructional innovation in action, followed by modification as needed and further investigation (Bradley & Reinking, 2011; Bradley, Reinking, Colwell, Hall, Fisher, Frey, & Bauman, 2012). Modifications follow an iterative pattern with ongoing questioning about how a literacy instructional practice might be modified to increase its effectiveness. Formative design requires “multiple sources of data, triangulation of findings, member checks, and other means of building the trustworthiness of conclusions” (p. 201). Thus, the present study ran for a full school year with ongoing data collection points and modifications that occurred during the course of the study as illustrated in Figure 1.

### Participants and Research Context

The context for this study was Arroyo International School (pseudonym), an international K–12 charter school with 943 students in the Southwest United States. Demographics at Arroyo included 50 percent Latino students from Mexico, El Salvador, and other South American locales, 22 percent African American, and 28 percent Asian Pacific Islander. The school qualified for Title I support. The middle school population consisted of 125 students, many

FIGURE 1 Formative Design Cycle



reading well below their grade placement. Seven participants from grades 6–8 voluntarily enrolled in an elective class taught by the first author during a school-wide elective period known as “Globals.” Two other students would later join as cast members for the film production portion of the class.

As a school-wide initiative, the teachers at the site were instructed by the administration to create a 50-minute class of their choosing. Each Global lasted for one semester. After that, students could sign up for another session or have the option of re-taking their original choice. This Global was entitled *Project iFlick: Integrating Film and Literature for Intercultural Knowledge*. The purpose of this Global was to enhance the school’s international focus by exploring the development of students’ intercultural understanding of human rights through cosmopolitan critical literacy and multimodal projects using a variety of digital and print texts centered on human rights and global citizenship.

*Instructional Format for iFlick.* On a typical day in the Global, students would view one of the short clips from [www.youthforhumanrights.org](http://www.youthforhumanrights.org) that presented the human rights sequentially. They would then participate in either a discussion or simulation centered on that particular human right that was either researcher-designed or drawn from the materials available through the organization Youth for Human Rights. During the Global sessions, we utilized a relaxed workshop/studio approach that facilitated a sense of informality that we believed was crucial to providing a “safe” space to explore critical issues. The last month of the class was dedicated to the creation of the multimodal production. As Vasudevan, Kerr, Hibbert, et al. (2014) suggest, “multimediated spaces nurture the emergence of adolescents’ cosmopolitan literacies... as they view their social locations as connected to another’s a few feet or a few thousand miles away” (p. 547).

The first semester that *iFLICK* was offered was more teacher/researcher directed and involved students creating a wall mural (see Figure 3) interpreting Bob Dylan’s ‘60s vintage tune, “Blowin in the Wind” from the standpoint of human rights represented in the song that were still relevant today. Students in the first semester also wrote a song and created a music video that focused on discrimination represented in the young adult (YA) novels and graphic novels they read in literature circles as illustrated in Figure 2.

The changes initiated in the second semester through formative design released much of the material choices and multimodal production decisions to students. In this semester, partially due to two of the students having participated in the previous semester and the reading attitudes/interests of some of the other students, we decided to utilize multimedia texts to a greater extent. Thus, the researchers acted as facilitators for the discussions and simulations arising from engagement with multimedia text. Additionally, we acted as production assistants/consultants for the human rights video students created.

*Participants.* Although the students at Arroyo were given the option to switch global electives in the second semester, a few students signed up again and served as unofficial mentors for the newcomers to the Global. Figure 4 offers a profile of each student and the role they played in the study.

### Role of the Researcher(s)

Given the role that student identity and experience played in the ways the students in the study took up global and local human rights issues, it seems necessary to be transparent in discussing our own identities and roles. In doing so, we acknowledge Lewis and Moje’s (2007) admonishment for the researcher(s) to be ever cognizant of their own history, power, and position.

The research team was comprised of three individuals. At the time of the study, I (Judith) was a full-time 5th/6th grade Reading teacher at the school. Although a Caucasian female with an advanced degree, my upbringing as a member of a traveling family band helped me to identify with some of the students’ sense of otherness and outsider status. Additionally, given that my three brothers and sister and I were only intermittently home-schooled, I view literacy and education as paramount to the fulfillment of other human rights.

Tom is a Caucasian university professor of literacy who grew up in the diverse surfing community of Honolulu, Hawai’i. Although raised in an upper-middle class home, his identity in Hawai’i as a “haole” provided him with experiences as the “other.” Acceptance in the Hawaiian cultures he participated in was largely due to being able to code-shift and in the development of a socially preferred self-effacing manner. Tom views blues music, lyric writing, and visual arts as universal pathways to understanding concepts across disciplines. He was

FIGURE 2 Examples of Multimedia and Print Texts used in *Project iFlick*

Print Text	Multimedia Text
Semester 1	Semester 2
<p><b>Young Adult Novels</b></p> <p>Ellis, D. (2009). <i>The breadwinner trilogy</i>. Toronto, Canada: Groundwood Press.</p> <p>Gallo, D. R. (2007). <i>First crossing: Stories about teen immigrants</i>. Sommerville, MA: Candlewick Press.</p> <p>McCormick, P. (2012). <i>Never fall down</i>. New York, NY: HarperCollins.</p> <p><b>Graphic Novels</b></p> <p>Delisle, G. (2009). <i>Pyongyang: A journey in North Korea</i>. Montreal, Canada: Drawn &amp; Quarterly Books.</p> <p>Satrapi, M. (2003). <i>Persepolis: The story of a childhood</i>. New York, NY: Random House</p> <p>Yang, G. L. (2006). <i>American born Chinese</i>. New York, NY: First Second Books.</p> <p><b>Picture Books</b></p> <p>Bunting, E. (2006). <i>One green apple</i>. New York, NY: Clarion Books</p> <p>Say, A. (2008). <i>Grandfather's journey</i>. New York, NY: HMH Books for Young Readers.</p> <p>Tan, S. (2006). <i>The arrival</i>. New York, NY: Arthur A. Levine Books/Scholastic.</p>	<p><b>Human Rights Materials</b></p> <p><i>The Story of Human Rights (DVD)</i> and booklet available at no cost to educators:  <a href="http://www.humanrights.com/freeinfo.html">http://www.humanrights.com/freeinfo.html</a></p> <p><i>Learn Your Human Rights: 30 Public Service Messages</i>.                      Available at:  <a href="http://www.humanrights.com/what-are-human-rights/universal-declaration-of-human-rights.html">http://www.humanrights.com/what-are-human-rights/universal-declaration-of-human-rights.html</a></p> <p>Multimedia and print text from <i>Human Rights Watch</i>  <a href="http://mm.hrw.org">http://mm.hrw.org</a>                      Including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <i>People on the move: Global abuses against migrants</i></li> <li>▪ <i>No refuge: Migrants in Greece</i></li> </ul> <p><b>Discussion Starters/Simulations</b></p> <p>Subconscious Perceptions of Race  <a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nFbvBJULVnc">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nFbvBJULVnc</a>                      Parents React to the "Doll Test"</p> <p><a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UOVwrcTzRBs">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UOVwrcTzRBs</a>                      What Would You Do? – Muslim Discrimination</p> <p><a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XvIDqgyK8fw">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XvIDqgyK8fw</a>                      Human Rights Maps  <a href="http://filipspagnoli.wordpress.com/human-rights-maps/maps-on-support-for-human-rights-and-democracy/">http://filipspagnoli.wordpress.com/human-rights-maps/maps-on-support-for-human-rights-and-democracy/</a></p>

the resident musician in the study, and the students often would beg to have him bring his guitar to class.

Khaled is a Middle Eastern doctoral student in a Teacher Education program at a large urban university. He grew up in a middle-class family and has lived in many countries. These experiences provided him with the ability to look at issues of diversity from a multicultural perspective. Khaled became interested in the academic aspect of human rights, especially in regard to literacy, as a result of being an eyewitness to the oppression, lack of human rights, and serious literacy issues in different cultures. In addition to playing the lute, he has recently been learning and religiously practicing guitar.

**Materials**

Due to limited resources available at the school (it lacked a library, a consistently operational computer lab, and computers in the classroom), the materials for this project were largely limited to what might be displayed on the researchers' laptops. It is important to note that although an initial set of human rights materials and multimedia resources were amassed as the introductory curriculum for the Global class, the majority of materials used were based on students' interests and led to the topic of the short film produced for this Global centered on Article Fourteen of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which states, "Everyone has the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution." Given the personal experiences of the majority of the



**FIGURE 3** *Still Blowin' in the Wind* Transmediated Mural



Note. Each panel of the mural represents a verse from the song portraying issues that are still relevant today.

**FIGURE 4** *Project iFlick* Participants

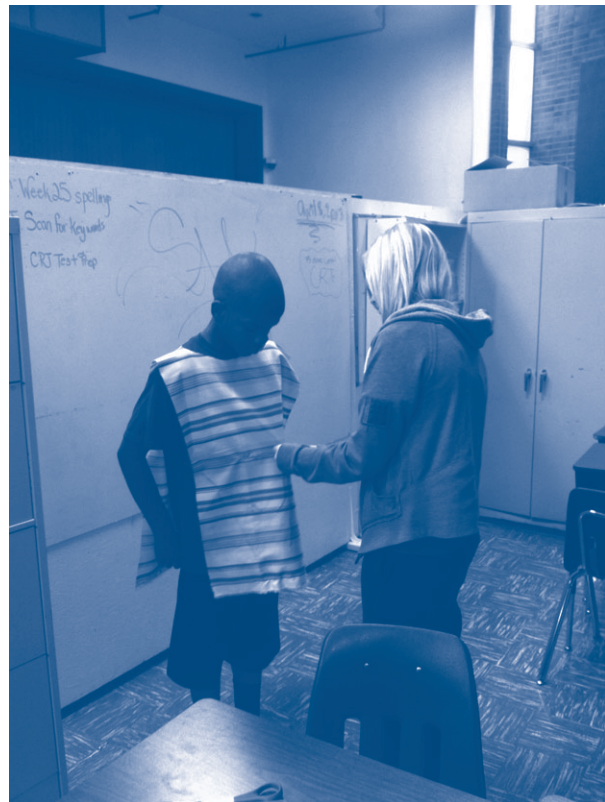
Name (pseudonym)	Grade	Self-Reported Ethnicity	Role in the Production
Inez	7 <sup>th</sup>	Latina (El Salvador)	Actress and post-production assistant
Lanie	7 <sup>th</sup>	Caucasian	Actress, storyboard writer
Jozef	8 <sup>th</sup>	Mexican	Soundtrack director
Brady	6 <sup>th</sup>	White	Actor and screenplay advisor
Reggie	8 <sup>th</sup>	African-American	Soundtrack and screenplay editor
Athena	8 <sup>th</sup>	Puerto Rican/Mexican	Head screenwriter, director, costume designer
Gwyneth	8 <sup>th</sup>	Irish-American	Screenwriter and costume designer/seamstress

students as Latina/o and the experiences of their own families around issues related to immigration, this human rights/social justice issue influenced the materials used once the students learned of that Human Right.

Although the students had engaged in multi-modal projects such as collage, clay sculpture, and other forms of art, they decided that they wanted to create a short film that they could share with the administration, parents, and other students at the school. Due to the paucity of resources available, we engaged in utilizations of “Bring Your Own Technology” or BYOT (Hagood & Skinner, 2012; Ehret & Hollett, 2013). Personal smartphones and tablets were used to make the short film. The editing and soundtrack compilation was completed on a personal laptop utilizing the school’s “ELMO” for projection to facilitate group participation in learning how to utilize movie making and editing software.

### Data Sources

The data for the study was drawn from the second semester *iFlick* was offered. Modifications based on the first semester guided formative design changes as the second semester *iFlick* project began. Data were collected during a 16-week semester on a daily basis and included (a) media-production artifacts (i.e., digital recordings, photographs, video storyboards, student-created costumes, and film location selections/rationales), (b) class discussions, (c) semi-structured interviews, and (d) field notes. The research team



compared field notes and met at least once a week to discuss and reflect on the study. Additionally, member checks were conducted when addressing particularly subjective interpretations such as costumes, storyboard illustrations, and locale selections. Before turning to our methods of data analysis, a brief synopsis of the students' culminating project, a short film entitled *Asylum: Seeking a Safe Place to Live* is offered here. The short film may be viewed at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qgo7P-f5ba4>.

### Synopsis of the film *Asylum*

In the year 3033, war breaks out in the fictional poverty-stricken country of Chinaka as a result of a longstanding rivalry between the Jermians and the Evins over a Romeo and Juliet-like scenario between two young lovers. Following a clash between the two groups that results in the death of a young Jermian, "Ydoc," a group of refugees decides to flee war-torn Chinaka for the peaceful and prosperous country of Niwaka. The group sets off on a perilous journey with few material possessions. They experience the effects of governmental corruption when their guide accepts a bribe from the President of Niwaka for information that leads to the border being closed to prevent them from entering the country. Only after the intercession of the human rights-minded Vice President does the president relent and grant asylum to the refugees.

### Data Analysis

Utilizing the constant comparative method (Corbin & Strauss, 2008), data generated interrelated themes

under the macro theme of cosmopolitan critical literacy and HRE/CE. Data evinced a need to examine how the students became "border-crossers" within these three spaces, how they identified and could speak to the interrelatedness of the global and the local, and the affordances of a cosmopolitan perspective on critical literacy and human rights/citizenship education to critique and respond to global/local issues.

### Findings

#### Writing and Performing the Global and Local

While composing this screenplay and *iMovie*, participants drew from their readings of print and multimedia texts where poverty, war, oppression, and deportation were daily realities. Their screenplay intermingled serious and comedic elements to portray realistic human emotions during the search for a safe place to live. Space and place mattered in composing a realistic journey to a better land, and they were careful in designing the film to capitalize on school ground spaces that looked realistic. Additionally, their biographies provided rich experiences in living at the intersection of the global and local. This combination of personal experience and readings of print and multi-media text are evident from the first frames of the film and demonstrate the ways in which the students enacted global and local understandings and could speak to their positioning within them. Moreover, in first storyboarding, then writing the screenplay,







scouting locations, costuming, acting, and finally engaging in post-production decisions, the students engaged in a wide range of multimodality that would not have been possible through a more traditional uni-modal assignment such as an essay or short story. Indeed, each one of these stages called on the students to engage in a different mode of making meaning creating something greater than the sum of its parts in the final production.

In the following section, we discuss the themes that emerged as students created and reacted to the film they made.

### School as Local/Global Microcosm: “Othering” and Group Membership

In the beginning of the film, a prequel provides the backstory for the refugees fleeing Chinaka after a feud erupts into violence. The scenario mirrored a real-life “back story” that had recently taken place at school and served as the inspiration for the names of the feuding groups in *Asylum*. Although the school espoused an international focus and had aspirations to be an International Baccalaureate school, ironically, many of the students struggled with group identities,

and cliques and bullying across racial/ethnic lines was not uncommon.

Athena was especially affected by this discord. She had friends in groups divided along racial lines and saw the opportunity to address a feud arising between two male students of different ethnicities over a female student of another group as the impetus for the war in the film. Similarly, Inez was troubled by the almost inevitable cliques of the “pretty” girls from others, especially as she felt that she could never be pretty because her family was not able to afford braces for her.

Although Athena was as vocal about these issues as Inez was reticent, each member of the group felt that at one time or another they had experienced, or positioned peers in the general school setting in the role of the “Other.” All of the students delineated discrimination and the resultant bullying as one of the main issues at the school that related to human rights. In some ways, then, the creation of the film spoke to the figurative refugees at the school who lacked the affordances and “asylum” of group membership.

### Living the “Spaces Between”: Macro-Local Issues of Immigration/Deportation

For Inez, issues related to immigration and deportation were not just the makings of plot twists in a classroom production, they were lived realities. Although hesitant to discuss details, she would opaquely refer to the struggles encountered by family members in their efforts to stay in this country while living under the threat of deportation. One day, in a discussion where she expressed frustration with her family’s plight, she said it was like they were “trapped in-between.” When asked to elaborate, she said, “They were like in two spaces and didn’t fully belong in either.” Other students knew of someone in their extended families or neighborhoods whose immigration status left them “in-between” spaces. Even those without immediate knowledge or experience with issues related to U.S. citizenship could recount incidents with discrimination based on their skin color or perceived nations of origin.

The students’ views on the treatment of immigrants and refugees took several forms in their short film. In speaking to the stereotypes, Athena and Gwyneth took a tongue-in-cheek approach to costuming, providing the refugees in the film with “hobo-bags” made of cloth and tied to sticks. The refugees’ costumes were fashioned out of scraps of

fabric, but taped to the students' school uniforms, which were left clearly visible. Lanie objected to Gwyneth's argument to bring in a sewing machine and buy more fabric. She argued that "... This is more realistic—refugees don't have the time or stuff to make clothes. They just have to go with what they have." While not the topic of lengthy discussion, the decision to literally "put on" a stereotypical identity over garments evidencing identity and group membership of a mainstream student allowed the participants to deconstruct and reconstruct stereotypical perceptions of immigrants and refugees. Athena spoke to this when Inez complained about using "hobo bags." She said, "You know what? That's what people see. They don't see a student, or kid or neighbor or whatever, you know? They see what they want." Athena's comments reflected what the students saw and began to articulate as their identities as both insider and outsider in the dominant society.

#### Traversing Global Spaces: "Walking With" Refugees

Perhaps the most poignant moments in the film depict the refugees, now betrayed by their guide, making their way to a safer place. In devising the soundtrack, Jozef selected music from an epic film that denotes the perilous nature of their journey and evoked a sense of what they have lost. In scouting locations for the film, the students chose spaces that mirrored a difficult personal journey as well as transnational diaspora. The school occupied an aging building that had numerous cosmetic and structural issues. Its location in a low-SES neighborhood necessitated large gates, which did little to prevent gang "tagging" and other vandalism. The school grounds were stark and dusty with blacktop and concrete landscapes with few green spaces, which the students capitalized on to provide a desolate path for the refugees in the film to travel.

The students scoured the Internet for scenes of war or natural disaster for Reggie to splice into the film to represent the war that precipitated the refugees' flight. In exploring the global plight of refugees against a developing understanding of human rights, the students contrasted the tragic with tongue-in-cheek humor to address what they believed to be the often-calloused attitudes of wealthy countries and the poor treatment generally provided to immigrants and refugees globally.

For example, in order to depict the housing that some refugees and immigrants endure, the students selected a decrepit skateboarding shed. While simplistic in depicting the complex needs of refugees and the difficulty nations face in providing for them, the students' selection of the shed was representative of shanty-type housing seen in refugee camps. Likewise, issues around border security responses to immigrants were taken to task when Brady suggested that we use his stuffed animal "Chewbacca" (from the film *Star Wars*) in a stop animation sequence to represent the border patrol guards of Niwaka. While it is possible that Brady was being funny, the older students commented on the juxtaposition of "scary" border guards portrayed in a robotic and comical manner. While a multifaceted topic, the idea that wealthy countries can deny access to those fleeing from danger, poverty, or oppression seemed to typify the immigration/refugee plight for the students and was met with a sardonic response.

Similarly, the President of Niwaka who initially denies the refugees access to his prosperous country, is re-named "President Megidiot" in a nod to the groups' agreement with Jozef, who said that "Countries who block refugees are 'mega-idiot.'" It is also worth noting the process the students went through in selecting a female student for the role of Vice President. In the first draft of the screenplay, the President was a woman, but as it was revised, Athena decided that a female President "wouldn't be this stupid" in rejecting the refugees, so a male President was cast. Reggie, who had volunteered to play the President, objected to Athena's stereotype, saying, "Look who's discriminating now!" He relented after the group agreed that he could make the ultimate decision to grant asylum after the female Vice President argues on the refugees' behalf.

#### Evolving Understandings of Global Issues

As the students explored issues related to local/global human rights through various texts while engaging in HRE/CE activities, their understanding of the global/local interrelatedness of these issues became more complex. Interview data indicate that at the beginning of the study, the students had vague ideas of human rights being "a right that humans have" or "something we should all have but probably don't, not really." However, as they became more immersed in their readings and

experiences through the *Youth for Human Rights* videos and simulations, the more they began to understand and, more importantly, wanted to act on what they saw as injustices, especially related to immigration.

It is difficult to portray in words the anger in Jozef's voice and the pain on Inez's face when they realized that the struggle, threat, and fear faced by many of their friends and family regarding nationality and the right to citizenship had been addressed in 1945 in the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights (UNDHR) but did not have the power of law. As they struggled with the dichotomous relationship of the promise and ideals in the UNDHR and the politics of local/global policies, they became more adamant that they had to share their film and their knowledge with others at the school. In doing so, they accepted the charge of Article 29 of the UDHR: the responsibility to share knowledge of human rights with others and take their first steps in advocacy.

### Reflexivity and Limitations

In seeking the change promised by a cosmopolitan perspective on critical literacy and human rights education, we must, as Deborah Hicks (2002) argues, begin our work in empathy to the Other, but then acknowledge our own complicity in social disparity and work toward justice and transformation. While we sought to em-power (give power) to the students through a cosmopolitan perspective on critical literacy and human rights education, there is a danger here. As Jennifer Gore (1993) argues, just because a particular pedagogy is viewed as liberatory does not free it from repressive potential.

In this case, we tried to give the students the "voice" to speak to human rights issues that were important both globally and to them locally. However, we did not find the opportunity to have immigrants/refugees in the community view and "speak back" to our interpretation of their experiences. Had we done so, it may have reduced the risk of unintentional hegemony in describing experiences for which we lacked firsthand knowledge.

Like all research, this study also has limitations. The most paramount being the space created by the "Globals" period that may not be possible in other school settings given mandated curriculum and other constraints. However, these limitations could be ameliorated by aligning the projects within the Common Core Standards, as this study was. It would also be

possible to hold a similar class as an afterschool program or club.

### Discussion

In this study, the affordances of a cosmopolitan perspective on critical literacy and human rights/citizenship education provided students with the opportunity to come together to explore global/local issues. The literal and figurative space of the "Globals" class allowed students to engage in critical literacy work that was important to them, and provided them with the opportunity to explore ways of advocating for others, as well as themselves. By writing, producing, and sharing their film, the students in this study truly exemplified literacy as more than a discrete skill set; they began to use a range of literacies with the notion that it does hold the power to transform. By engaging with local and global issues through a cosmopolitan perspective, this project utilized critical literacy to "take into consideration both local and distant relations of power" (Alvermann, 2012, p. 64).

As Friere and Macedo (1987) urge, "Educators must develop radical pedagogical structures that provide students with the opportunity to use their own reality as a basis for literacy" (p. 151). In expanding the scope of critical literacy beyond the borders of literal nation-state(s) to the amorphous borders of a transnational world, our students were asked to consider how one positions and is positioned individually, how one is silenced, or silences others individually, but also what are the ramifications of that silence when it occurs on a global scale? Projects such as *iFlick* offer an example of what is possible when a cosmopolitan perspective on critical literacy is used to inform multimodal projects that originate with, and are relevant to, students' lives.

In the current educational climate, the time would seem ripe to find spaces for interpretive work to explore human rights issues through CCL and the pedagogical possibilities of formative design. Yet frequently we become entranced in the panoptic gaze of mandates and standards, and miss the chance to view the world through a cosmopolitan lens. The utilization of digital media and HRE/CE encourages students to view the world through that lens and explore the lived realities of others. In so doing, they truly read both the word and the world (Freire, 1970). The work of critical educators is to resist the

## Take Action

## STEPS FOR IMMEDIATE IMPLEMENTATION

- **Visit** the website Youth for Human Rights ([www.youthforhumanrights.org](http://www.youthforhumanrights.org))
- **Watch** and discuss the short PSA ads for each human right with your students.
- **Find** out what issues/rights resonate with your students.
- **Explore** different ways of expressing these rights/issues through multimodal literacy productions (short films, murals, digital storytelling, etc.).
- **Share** the projects with other stakeholders: December 10—International Human Rights Day is the perfect opportunity to showcase students' work!

commonplace and to look for the promise held in radical practice. As Meredith Cherland and Helen Harper (2007) remind us,

We often see and understand, but then do not know how to act. If we are to change the world through literacy education, we will need to find new ways to work in the classrooms and new forms of research to inform our best efforts. We will also need the courage to face new knowledge and to act on it. (p. 128)

In moving our work as literacy educators into the realm of the global through CCL and HRE/CE, we continue in the tradition of critical literacy that informs our practice while inviting us ever forward.

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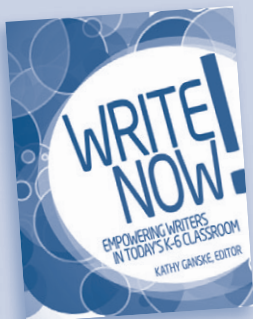
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## More to Explore

### CONNECTED CONTENT-BASED RESOURCES

- ✓ Imagine a World Without Hate—Anti-Defamation League <http://www.youtube.com/user/ADLNational?v=3KyvIMJefR4>
- ✓ The Three of Us: Madison Graboyes at TED x Global Learning School <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0009Wa26WvM>
- ✓ Education and Literacy: Overcoming Cultural Barriers <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8A7kpgmsbl4>



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